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ABSTRACT

This paper provides data from students in an educational administration class on use of teaming and collaboration to research educational problems. The instructor taught group dynamics and modeled the process of facilitating and developing collaboration in teams. Classes were offered in 3-1/2 hour sessions for 5 weeks. Various team-building materials were conducted throughout the course of the class, and simulations and field studies were used to encourage insight into group process and problems of communication. This paper discusses the effectiveness of: (1) course content and materials; (2) learning activities and skill practice; and (3) working in teams to accomplish class and team objectives. The purpose of the study was to collect data for class improvement but also to model the need to effectively assess work-team progress in the workplace. When what they liked best about the class, students commented positively about experiencing a mixture of lecture and group activity, learning about themselves while being in a team, and being treated as professionals who could work effectively in teams. Suggestions were mixed about the content-laden midterm but positive about being graded on both their individual and group test scores. An appendix contains a copy of the questionnaire. (Contains 14 references.) (DFR)

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Roundtable Concerning Teaching in Educational Administration: Organizing, Leading and Monitoring Effective Work Teams

Purpose of this Paper

This roundtable concerns teaching in educational administration. This paper provides data from students in an educational administration class on teaming and collaboration where teams worked independently to research educational problems. The instructor taught group dynamics and modeled the process of facilitating and developing collaboration in teams. Students were evaluated as individuals and as a team. This paper concerns effectiveness of (a) course content and materials, (b) learning activities and skills practice, and (c) working in teams to accomplish class and team objectives. The purpose of this study was to collect data for class improvement but also to model the need to effectively assess team activities in order to monitor and assess work team progress in the workplace.

Conceptual Frame

Educational leaders must work with teams of faculty, staff, and parents to plan effective educational programs and monitor learning outcomes. Teams aligned for progress empower individuals (Senge, 1990, p. 235) and provide a shared understanding of what is needed to get jobs done. Students in this class were taught skills and processes to work effectively in teams (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). The instructional process and curriculum content of this class were integrated by continuous evaluation (Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder, 1999). Continuous monitoring of progress was a positive force in allowing teams to work independently to reach team and class goals. Future administrators learned processes that they could use as they facilitated work groups in schools and school districts. Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, & Snyder (p. 151) comment that in education, "Rarely were evaluation practices integrated into the overall organizational development plan." This class format attempted to integrate evaluation into both class content and process, both to improve the class and model data driven decision making.

Participants

Participants in this study were Masters or post Masters students enrolled in programs in educational administration, higher education, sports administration, or business. Participants were given the Gregorc Style Delineator (Gregorc,1983). They were organized into teams of five to seven people, each team containing individuals with different styles as defined by the Gregorc Style Delineator.

Theory and practice were combined in each class session, and teams were taught new patterns of relationships (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, & Slack) that "run counter to the kind of isolation and independent work characteristics

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of teachers in our schools." Teams used problem finding and problem solving skills and processes to determine their team projects, develop a plan to accomplish their goals, monitor team progress, plan and present their research to the class, and share their research in a printed brochure or newsletter. Teams experienced the problems and benefits of working in a group. Grades earned in the class were based on combinations of individual and group assessments.

Method

Class Sessions

Classes were offered in three and one-half hour sessions, Friday nights and Saturday mornings, for five weeks. All techniques used in the class were explained as they were used and students were encouraged to critique methodology. Various team-building activities were conducted throughout the course of the class and simulations and field studies were used to encourage insight into group process, and problems of communication.

Class Format and Curriculum

The Gregorc Style Delineator (Gregorc, 1985) and two texts were used, Teamwork: What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong (Larson & LaFasto, 1989) and Group Processs: An Introduction to Group Dynamics (Luft, (1984). Teamwork was read using the jigsaw method. Lecture, discussion, small and large group practice of communication skills, simulations, and team-building activities were used in class sessions. Students used various methods of brainstorming to determine a class purpose and to define current educational problems of interest to the group. Using those identified educational problems, teams used nominal group process to determine three problems on which they would do a preliminary literature review. After conducting a search of the literature, teams chose one problem on which to concentrate their research.

The team then used an Ishikawa diagram to further define the educational problem, and divide the problem into subsections that individuals would explore. Choosing their own form of organization, teams spent part of each class working on the team problem. Students practiced communication and organization skills while documenting progress using action plans that indicated (a) actions or decisions made, (b) activities planned, (c) resources needed, (d) people responsible, (e) date of expected completion, and (f) actual completion date. The instructor monitored action plans after each session.

Expectations of excellence and methods of continuous motivation were modeled and explained. At midterm a content laden individual examination was given and a time limit for completion was set. When the time limit was up, each team was given a second, identical test, and allowed to work together to complete the test a second time. Individual and group scores were averaged (unless the individual score was higher). An additional hour of team discussion and debate insured knowledge of class content for all.

Completion of team projects served as a final examination. Final presentations ranged from symposiums to videos, and research findings of each team were distributed to all class members in the form of brochures or newsletters. Team members evaluated each member of their team, including themselves. Low scoring team members could lose up to five of 100 points of their grade. Students also evaluated their team as a unit.

Students learned the process of working with and monitoring teams by engaging in the kind of activities they could expect to monitor in the workplace.

Monitoring and Assessing Teams

Several methods of monitoring and assessment of teams and team members were used. Assessment was both formative and summative.

Formative Student Evaluation

Reflections, action plans, and an examination of the midterm test served as formative evaluations. Student reflections provided ongoing communication with the instructor, and were helpful in indicating when teams needed assistance with group dynamics. After each session each student was encouraged to write about their most important learning and to share reflections with the instructor. These reflections were collected, answered, and returned after each session creating a written conversation between students and instructor. Action plans were monitored to assess team progress, but teams had the freedom and flexibility to choose their own work methods. The midterm examination was analyzed by the instructor in order to improve instruction and the test format.

Summative Student Evaluation

Student evaluations of team members and of their team were part of the final evaluation process. Students were evaluated using (a) individual and team self-evaluation (b) individual and group test grades, and (c) team projects and presentations.

Data Collection

Data from students enrolled in these classes, 1997 through 1999, were collected using: (a) end of semester student evaluation surveys and (b) student evaluations of their work teams. Both the team evaluations and the class evaluations were surveys that used a five point Likert scale. The students rated positive statements about their teams and their class from 1 to 5 with 1 = not at all, 2 = sometimes, 3 = usually, 4 = often, 5 = always.

Data Analysis

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics used to analyze quantitative data collected in surveys about class instruction and methods. Appendix A provides the format of the survey about team effectiveness. Student written comments and suggestions for improvement were also analyzed and compared across different classes with attention to themes found in the aggregated data.

Results

The format of the class and class materials and activities were rated (See Table 1) by the students with mean scores ranging from 2.3 to 5.0. Standard deviations ranged from .16 to 1.28.

Team ratings (Appendix A) by individual team members on 19 of 20 questions ranged from 4.2 to 5.0. The only question with a lower mean score was the question " Being on a team was hard work." The mean score for that question ranged from 1.0 to 5.0. Team comments were positive about working with teams and team members.

When asked "What did you like best about this class?" students comments were positive about: (a) mixture of lecture and group activity, (b) learning about themselves while being in a team, and (c) being treated as professionals who could work effectively in teams. Suggestions were mixed about the content-laden midterm, but positive about being graded on both their individual and group test scores. They suggested larger type for overheads and less notetaking.

Conclusions

Students enjoyed working in teams where there was continuous assessment to provide information ensuring that all members contributed to team effort. Students learned to appreciate individual differences and to work with a diverse group of people aligned in working toward the same goal. Students utilized a variety of team processes, structures, and work methods that suited their team. Team produced professional looking brochures, newsletters, and even videos summarizing their research projects as well as presenting their results to the class in a variety of formats.

Data from class evaluations indicated that the class format was effective and enjoyable. The students learned both knowledge of the characteristics of effective teams and the dynamics of group process as they worked together to develop required outputs. Class products indicated a high level of team commitment. Evaluations indicated that problem finding and problem solving techniques were valued as well as the use of individual daily reflections.

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Table 1
Summary Evaluation of Collaboration Course

Rating of Activity on a Five Point Scale	1997 Mean n=30	1998 Mean n=15	1999 Mean * n=27
1. TeamWork, was a good text for this course.	4.8	4.5	4.6
2. Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics, was a good text.	4.0	3.8	4.1
3. The syllabus reflected the content of this course.	4.9	4.8	4.9
4. Teaching methods were appropriate.	5.0	4.9	4.9
5. The instructor was knowledgeable about the topics presented.	5.0	4.9	5.0
6. The instructor could clarify questions or confusion about course content.	5.0	4.7	4.9
7. The amount of outside work for this class was appropriate.	5.0	4.8	4.9
8. The kind of work assigned in this class was relevant to the topic.	5.0	4.8	4.9
9. The kind of work done in class and assigned was relevant to my educational needs.	5.0	4.5	4.0
Evaluate learning activities or skills taught in class.			
10. Reflections/Greatest Learnings	4.4	3.7	4.1
11. Gregorc Style Delineator	4.7	4.7	4.9
12. Reading a book by the jigsaw method	4.4	4.0	4.4
13. Brainstorming	4.3	4.2	4.5
14. Creating a mascot (team building activity)	4.2	2.3	4.3
15. Observing and critiquing a team	4.6	4.1	4.3
16. Observing an individual team member's skills	4.6	4.1	4.3
17. Lectures	4.5	4.4	4.3
18. Team presentations	4.8	4.6	4.6
19. Team project	4.9	4.5	4.8
20. Sharing images with team	4.4	3.6	4.5

* Standard Deviations ranged from .16 to 1.28

Appendix A

Team Assessment **Team**_____

Please use the rating scale on the right to give ratings to your team. The numbers are: 1=not at all, 2=sometimes, 3=usually, 4=often, 5=always.

1.	Our team was able to keep focused on our project.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Our team was able to accomplish our task.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	All of the members of our team were competent.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	All of our members were committed to our task.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	Our team had a collaborative climate.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	Our team had high standards for our project and presentation.	1 2 3 4 5
7.	Our team believed that we were supported by the instructor.	1 2 3 4 5
8.	People taking leadership in our team held high principles.	1 2 3 4 5
9.	Our team worked at getting along with each other.	1 2 3 4 5
10.	All members of our team contributed to our efforts.	1 2 3 4 5
11.	Team members supported each other.	1 2 3 4 5
12.	There was a "good mix" of people on our team.	1 2 3 4 5
13.	Being on a team was fun.	1 2 3 4 5
14.	Being on a team was hard work.	1 2 3 4 5
15.	Our team accomplished more than I could have done alone.	1 2 3 4 5
16.	Our team was more creative than I would have been alone.	1 2 3 4 5
17.	I would enjoy working with this team again.	1 2 3 4 5
18.	I made a contribution to the team spirit of our group.	1 2 3 4 5
19	I feel like a valued member of our team.	1 2 3 4 5
20.	I was able to contribute my share to our team effort.	1 2 3 4 5

Comments: